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MUSIC IN TODAY'S CATHOLIC LITURGY

Submitted by:

RICHARD J. HENTZ
Chaplain (LTC), USA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

WHAT MUSIC CAN DO FOR WORSHIP 2

SOME PERENNIAL PROBLEMS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP 5

MUSIC IN CATHOLIC WORSHIP TODAY 7

CONCLUSION 13

BIBLIOGRAPHY 15

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council promulgated the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy on December 4, 1963; the Council Fathers stated: "Liturgical action is given a more noble form when sacred rites are solemnized in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people."[1] On March 5, 1967, the Congregation of Rites, in its Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, implementing the Constitution's chapter on sacred music, stated in rather poetic fashion: "One cannot find anything more solemn and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song."[2] That is the theory Catholics have been living with for the nine years past. But what of the practice?

Phenomenology betrays the hyperbole of the 1967 Instruction. The experience of our sung worship today scarcely squares with the beautiful, theoretical description issued then. Most Catholics these days would not describe their regular Sunday worship experiences as "more solemn and more joyful" because they are expressed in song. It is more like noise in our solemn assemblies.

Where lies the problem? Why the disparity between theory and practice? Why are our celebrations not more solemn and more joyful when sung? Is the theory wrong? Or is the theory right but impossible to implement? Or is it

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[1]Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Litury, No. 113.

[2]Congregation of Rites, Instruction on Music in the Sacred Liturgy, March 5, 1967.

that few are prepared to incarnate the solemnity and joy of sung communal worship, i.e., too few understand the role of music in worship, too few are sufficiently accomplished as liturgical musicians to carry out the correct theory?

Since there are situations of worship in which music does clearly add the notes of solemnity and joy to celebration, the theory must be correct and possible. We must look for the fault in the practice and in the lack of understanding and training that lies behind that practice. We must first know the proper expectations for music in worship in order to move toward a realization of those expectations.

WHAT MUSIC CAN DO FOR WORSHIP

> The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of immeasurable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred melody united to words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.
> Holy Scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and the same may be said of the Fathers of the Church and of the Roman pontiffs who in recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function rendered by sacred music in the service of the Lord.[3]

Unlike architecture, painting and sculpture which stand around the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, creating a beautiful and functional place for worship, music enters into the liturgical moment itself; "it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy". Music is capable of turning a place for celebration into a live, celebrative moment. Music's function in worship is totally "ministerial", i.e., it must serve the expression of faith in the assembly of the People of God, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy points out.

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[3]Second Vatican Council, op. cit., No. 112.

As a servant, music functions in several ways. First, it is able both to express and to create unity among the participants. The liturgical assembly is a coming-together of many people from different backgrounds, contrasting experiences, and, perhaps, conflicting faith-visions. Yet, despite the diversity, they are somehow present in assembly because they share faith in the risen Lord.

> A man is a Christian because through the Christian community he has met Jesus Christ, heard his word in invitation, and responded to him in faith. Christians gather at Mass that they may hear and express their faith again in this assembly and, by expressing it, renew and deepen it.[4]

Music can assist the fusion of these diverse persons into a single, celebrative community.

Secondly, Christian worship is centered upon the Word of God in Scripture and in Eucharist. The Word-made-flesh enters into dialogue with men and, in words and symbols, men respond. Music explores the rich meaning of the words and symbols. It heightens them so that they become more fully expressive and so that certain words, phrases and signs are emphasized over those of lesser importance.

Thirdly, those who come together to worship are stepping aside from the ebb and flow of daily existence in order to penetrate the faith dimension of that existence. They worship in a formal setting to praise the God who permeates the informal fabric of their daily lives. The Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy continues:

> We do not come to meet Christ as if he were absent from the rest of our lives. We come together to deepen our awareness of, and commitment to, the action of his Spirit in the whole of our lives at every moment. We come together to acknowledge the love of God poured out among us in

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[4]U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Music in Catholic Worship, 1972, No. 1.

the work of the Spirit, to stand in awe and praise.[5]

Music has the capacity for contributing to the establishment of a tone and an atmosphere appropriate for such deepening and such acknowledgement. In its own unique language, music says: This is a celebration of the love of man and woman; of hope in life beyond death; of new life initiated into the community of faith; of change of heart; of the healing power of prayer; or simply of ordinary life, lifted through the faith shared by the community. Music can set the tone for saying and celebrating such events. It can help us believe that, despite the darkness of winter, there is deep within us an unconquerable summer.

Fourthly, our celebrations are enhanced by beauty. Music can add this aesthetic dimension to what can often be a rather flat experience of recitation. Beautiful sounds can bring to the light of consciousness the "wordless song" which lies in the depth of each soul.

Fifthly, the worship experience, no matter whether it is said in the splendor of a cathedral or the simplicity of a home, calls for a certain solemnity. It must be an experience lifted above the trite, the banal, the ordinary everyday events. The power of ordered sound and silence, that is, music, can shape the ordinariness of recitation into moments of extraordinary solemnity, appropriate, of course, to the time and the place.

Finally, liturgical structures possess their own rhythym. There is an ordered arrangement of the elements and acts of the celebration. Some are more important than others, some prepare for the more important acts, some are purely background moments, and so forth. The nature of each part must be

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[5]Ibid., No. 2.

respected if the whole is to have its proper rhythym. Each part must flow smoothly from and into the next. Music has the facility for accentuating liturgy's built-in rhythym, it can explore and heighten the meaning of the liturgical acts. It can highlight, for example, the Eucharistic Prayer, by singing the acclamations: the Holy, Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen. Yet even more acclamatory involvement of the worshippers is needed to sufficiently climax the Eucharistic Prayer. The Preparation of the Gifts, which is simply the placing of the gifts upon the altar and of lesser significance in the liturgical structure, can be given its proper rhythym by the use of some rather soft, subliminal music. This serves as a breather between the climax of the Liturgy of the Word and the key moment of the Eucharistic Prayer.

SOME PERENNIAL PROBLEMS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP

It will be noticed that the previous section of this article stated that music can do all of these wonderful things for worship. The word "can" was judiciously chosen for, unfortunately, as often as not, music does not do these things. It is, as we know, quite capable of doing just the opposite.

The history of music in worship indicates that musicians have never been at ease taking the humble role of servant in the liturgy, i.e., performing a "ministerial function". Ecclesiastical legislation on music in worship bears witness to the fact that music has a strong propensity to be the lord and master rather than the servant. Instead of coming to the worship experience, asking "what may I do for you?", it has, and still does all too often, come with the bold statement: "This is what I can do. Take it or leave it!" Artists by nature have difficulty balancing freedom and discipline. Church

documents from Docta sanctorum of Pope John XXII in the 14th century up to the final pre-Vatican II Roman instruction on sacred music in 1958 are predominantly condemnatory of musical abuses of domination. The conciliar and postconciliar documents and legislation of the Vatican II era tend to be much more positive toward music, so long as it maintains its "ministerial function". Thus, if music can serve, it can also unfortunately dominate.

If music can turn a place into a live celebrative moment, it can also kill the moment by heaviness, by frivolity and inanity, by excluding the congregation or by not respecting the liturgical rhythm..

If music can express and create unity among worshippers, it can also deeply divide them by being in a style acceptable to some and offensive to others, by being too difficult for some or too easy or banal for others.

If music can explore and heighten the meaning of texts, it can also conceal and depress that meaning. By excessively elongating certain syllables, by imposing a musical rhythm not consonant with the language rhythm, by heightening unimportant words, music can destroy and depress the words communicating the Word.

If music can set an appropriate tone and atmosphere, it can also set a tone which is unsuitable for the occasion, a particular community, or unsuitable for worship entirely.

If music can contribute to the solemnization of liturgical moments, lifting them from the ordinariness of existence to moments of meeting with the Word and the community called and formed by the Word, it can also make worship so pompous and triumphalistic that only a pseudonymous Ponderous B. Portly would feel comfortable presiding.

Finally, if music can accentuate liturgical rhythm, it can also cause a destructive modulation in the rhythym of worship. By accenting the "off-beat" moments, music can create a kind of "syncopated" liturgy in which the acts intended to be rhythmically connected become disconnected and distorted.

MUSIC IN CATHOLIC WORSHIP TODAY

Having stated many of the expectations we should have for music in the liturgy, and having mentioned the destructive potential of each of these expectations, we may proceed to discuss ways in which the expectations may be more fully realized and the dangers more readily averted.

First of all, let it be stated clearly that there is no Golden Age to which we may look for the solution to our problems of music in worship. A knowledge of the history of music in worship can be a valuable light shining upon current problems and possibilities but it can give no answers to our contemporary problems. History can show us how musicians and churchmen of yesterday grappled with the delicate balance desired for music in service of worship. It can tell us that music has a tendency to dominate the text it is meant to serve; that certain kinds of music from the theater and the opera have not been considered consonant with liturgical structures; that certain instruments have been condemned for use in liturgy because they distract and offend. (Benedict XIV, in the encyclical Annus qui of 1749, specifically prohibited the use of trombone, oboe, flute, tympani and mandoline in worship.)

The history of music in worship can also teach us how historically conditioned was the music of past times. It was the reflection of the philosophical and artistic presuppositions of those days. Art reflects culture and helps to create culture. Music's relation to worship was just as historically con-

ditioned. Correlatively we must know that the music of our day must serve worship in a way that is conditioned by our own times, our own cultures, our own history. Our models must be patterned ultimately not upon the papal liturgy of Gregory I, the monastic prayer of Benedict, the baroque worship of the Counter-Reformation, the 19th century restorations of Solesmes, or even the reform of Vatican II. All of these were responses to the needs of the assemblies of those times. To be truly faithful to that tradition, we must discover models that reflect faith-celebrations in our times. Our patterns of celebration must hand on and celebrate that one same faith proclaimed and lived by Peter and Paul, by Gregory the Great, by Benedict and Borromeo, by Gueranger and John XXIII. But this handing on must be done in styles and patterns that suit our varied needs. The present "Oder of the Mass" allows for considerable variety in patterns, i.e., what is sung and what is recited.

Such patterning of music for the worship of today demands pastoral planning by competent persons. Those who are responsible for major liturgical roles in the community's worship should meet regularly to prepare each liturgical celebration. This is essential for creative and coordinated worship experiences.

> The particular preparation for each liturgical celebration should be done in a spirit of cooperation by all parties concerned, under the guidance of the rector of the church, whether it be ritual, pastoral, or musical matters.[6]

> In practice this ordinarily means an organized "planning team" or committee which meets regularly to achieve creative and coordinated worship and a good use of the liturgical and musical options of a flexible liturgy.[7]

Celebrations should be unified by the feast, the season, and the appointed

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[6]Congregation of Rites, Instruction on Music in the Sacred Liturgy, March 5, 1967, No. 5e.

[7]U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Music in Catholic Worship, 1972, No. 10.

readings creating an artistic unity flowing from the skillful and sensitive selection of options, music and related arts.

> The sacred scriptures ought to be the source and inspiration of sound planning for it is the very nature of celebration that men hear the saving words and works of the Lord and then respond in meaningful signs and symbols. Where the readings of the lectionary possess a thematic unity the other elements ought to be so arranged as to constitute a setting for and response to the message of the Word.[8]

Members of the planning team might begin their meetings with prayerful reflection on the appointed scriptural passages. After a group discussion, in which personal thoughts would be shared, patterns for celebration could be fashioned reflecting the Word to be proclaimed.

Who should be on the planning team? The Bishops' Committee answers this question very clearly and succinctly:

> The planning team or committee is headed by the priest (celebrant and homilist) for no congregation can experience the security of a unified celebration if that unity is not grasped by the one who presides, as well as by those who have special roles. It should include those with the knowledge and artisitic skills needed in celebration--men and women trained in music, poetry, and art, and knowledge in current resources in these areas--men and women sensitive to the present day thirst of so many riches of scripture, theology, and prayer. It is always good to include some members of the congregation who have not taken special roles in the celebrations so that honest evaluations can be made.[9]

It seems to me quite necessary that a division of tasks be established within the team. Not everyone should be responsible for preparing the homily or selecting the music and other options. My concept of the planning team is that the group would reflect upon the Scriptures, letting the Word of God shine on their lives. This should raise issues and values that are real in that community. From this general prayerful discussion, those responsible for preaching and preparing the music would do so, on their own, attempting to reflect

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[8] Ibid., No. 11.

[9] Ibid., No. 12

the thoughts which arose in the planning session. The team, after the celebration, would then give feedback on the successes and failures of the celebration as they experienced it.

A danger to be avoided here, however, is that of missing the forest for the trees. The team can become so absorbed in analyzing each part of the worship experience that they miss the totality, like the musician who comes away from a symphony concert and recalls primarily that the oboe missed his entry without having a recollection of the totlity of the concert. A correlative danger is that the team can become so absorbed in critiquing worship that it never gets around to worshipping.

How much planning should be done? It is possible to over-plan and to over-unify a liturgy. Our liturgies must leave some room for flexibility and even error. The human dimension of the assembly must not be "planned" out nor must the unified theme come through "in stereo" at each possible moment. Yet integral planning should go beyond the choosing of options, songs and ministers to the composition of the brief introduction, the general intercessions and other appropriate comments during the celebration.

"To determine the value of a given musical element in a liturgical celebration a threefold judgment must be made: musical, liturgical, and pastoral."[10]

First of all, the planning team should ask the question, is this good music? Is it technically, aesthetically and expressively sound? This basic musical judgment should be made by those with some musical competence. Certainly opinions on this matter will vary. One thing to be avoided, however, is the

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[10] Ibid., No. 25.

confusionof judgment of style and the judgment of value. A compositions value must not be determined by its musical style. For example, there is good and bad music in the folk style. There is good and bad music in the Gregorian and polyphonic styles. We do not automatically condemn it because it is folk or accept it because it is chant and polyphony. We judge value within each style. Folk music and other new styles, such as electronic music, can be quite effective servants of the liturgical moment. These should not be seen as a replacement of the treasury of music used in worship but rather as an experimental and necessary supplement. As newer forms are developed and tried, we must remember the words of St. Augustine in De Musica: "Do not allow yourselves to be offended by the imperfect while you strive for the perfect."

Secondly, the planning team will ask: If this is good music, is it suitable for the liturgy? Does it truly serve the distinct yet unified liturgical moments? Does it properly express the texts? Does it respect the nature of each of the parts of the celebration? This is the liturgical judgment about which the Bishops' Committee spoke above. The choice of music should reflect the relative importance of each part and the rhythm that exists between the various parts. For example, since music heightens and adds weight to a particular liturgical moment and action, it would not be wise to select music for the offertory which would be so strong and engaging that the Eucharistic Prayer and its singing would appear flat by comparison. The Liturgy of the Eucharist must peak during the anaphora, not during the offertory. Another example concerns the entrance rite. This is simply a ritual whereby the community recognizes itself as a faith assembly and prepares to hear the proclamation of the Word of God. To make too much of the entrance rite by singing all of its parts, for example, is to give it undue emphasis and create an imbalance with the Service of the Word that follows. This is not to eliminate concern for these

secondary rites. It is simply meant to keep them secondary.

In connection with the liturgical judgment, the planning team must also see to it that role differentiation is respected. Persons who celebrate together must do all but only those parts pertaining to their office within the assembly. The congregation should be involved through active participation which should include not only singing together but listening together at appropriate times, such as, during an occasional festive choir Gloria and a choral or instrumental prelude, offertory or communion piece. The cantor should lead the singing of the congregation, always using songs within their performance ability so as to insure comfort and security in celebration. Avoiding undue virtuoso display, he can also do solo work, especially in responsorial compositions and particularly between the readings. The choir should also function to support the congregation's song and to add its own unique beauty and solemnity to the celebration. Finally, the instrumentalists should be allotted their role of supporting the singing of the choir and congregation and of playing solos to stimulate feelings of joy and contemplation at appropriate times in the liturgy. This might be done as a prelude; as very soft, subliminal music during the penitential rite which would extend the melody of the processional; during the spoken responsorial psalm; during the preparation of gifts in place of singing; during portions of the communion rite, and as a recessional. Though the organ is the more familiar instrument for worship, other instruments should be included increasingly to add variety and supplemental beauty to the celebration. One caution: They should be played in a manner suitable for public worship. Such suitability is not so much taught as caught.

The final criterion for the evaluation of music in worship is the pas-

toral judgment. Having decided that a given piece of music is aesthetically valuable, and having determined that this composition respects and fits the structures of the liturgical rite, the planning team must decide if the music fits this particular situation. Does this good, liturgically acceptable music enable these people to express their faith, in this place, in this age, in this culture? This must be the overriding judgment. If the pastoral answer is "no", then the music should not be used.

> The signs of the celebration must be accepted and received as meaningful for a genuinely human faith experience for these specific worshippers. This pastoral judgment can be aided by sociological studies of the people who make up the congregation: their age, culture, and education. These factors influence the effectiveness of the liturgical signs, including music. No set of rubrics or regulations of itself will ever achieve a truly pastoral celebration of the sacramental rites. Such regulations must always be applied with a pastoral concern for the given worshipping community.[11]

CONCLUSION

Music has an incredible potential to turn ritual into celebration. The fact that so often the potency remains unrealized is due to many factors. One of these is the lack of understanding of the role music is to play in Catholic worship. This paper has attempted to explore that role and expose it to those involved in planning and executing the music for our worship services. Another factor contributing to current problems in Catholic worship music is the lack of properly trained personnel. The U.S. Bishops' statement of 1972, "Music in Catholic Worship", has spelled out beautifully the role of music and how it is to be integrated into worship. Yet there are so few who can carry it off. There are musicians available, without question, but so few of them have training in the liturgy. There are people, on the other hand, who have a sensitivity

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[11]Ibid., No. 41

for worship but who know little or no music. The problematic then is how to find a competent musician who is trained in liturgy as well.

At this time in this land there are scarcely any serious programs for liturgical musicians. Training programs must be developed in several parts of the country to meet this need. These would be programs which would be aimed at persons of differing needs and on differing levels of competency in liturgical music. Unless this is done, and done soon, music will not fulfill its ministerial function in the liturgies in our land. We will continue to have noise in our solemn assemblies. Faith will not flourish as it might because we lack celebrations in which it is well expressed. For good celebrations can foster and nourish faith and poor celebrations can weaken and destroy faith.

> We find today a vital interest in the Mass as prayer and here lies the principle of synthesis. When everyone with one accord strives to make the Mass a prayer, a sharing and celebration of Faith, then there will be unity --many styles of music, a broad choice of instruments, a wide variety of forms of celebration, but a single purpose: that men of faith may proclaim and share that faith in prayer and that Christ may grow among us.[12]

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[12]Ibid., No. 84

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RICHARD J. HENTZ
Chaplain (LTC), USA
C-22 (73-1)